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HIS LITTLE MOTHER
MISS M ULOCK

COSY CORNER SERIES

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"Cosy Corner Series"

HIS LITTLE MOTHER

BY

MISS MULOCK

AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN," ETC.

Illustrated by Etheldred B. Barry



BOSTON
JOSEPH KNIGHT COMPANY
1896

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HIS LITTLE MOTHER.

PART I TEN YEARS OLD



THEY sat close together—a rather isolated little pair, boy and girl, apparently brother and sister—at the merry tea-table of a children's party. Children's parties then were not exactly what they are now. We used to be invited at four o'clock, and we always left at half past eight—on our feet, generally—for our toilets were not of a kind which would startle the streets of that innocent country town. We had short sleeves, certainly, and comparatively low necks, but tippets and long white lincn gloves made all right, and our frocks descended comfortably to the ankle. Besides which we wore beautiful white frilly "trousers"—or plain ones of the same material as the dress. Hats, too, which really covered the head, and were tied down, gypsy fashion, over

a bush of curls — if our hair would curl ; if not, it was plaited into tails — the more the better. I remember on state occasions my mother used to plait mine into six, three on each side, tied with bright ribbons, of which I was exceedingly proud.

This little girl — perhaps she had no mother to be conceited about her hair, for it was only divided into two tails, not very carefully plaited, and tied with rather shabby brown ribbon. Neither she nor the little boy was quite as well dressed as the rest of the young party ; but they were neat and clean, and, though not exactly blooming children, were interesting, if only from the way they seemed to hang together, as though accustomed to depend upon themselves, or rather upon one another, for everything.

At least, so it seemed to the lady who watched them — one Miss Waldershare, a rich and lonely woman, glad of any interest, especially when it came in the shape of a child. She was only a passing visitor in the town, and had come almost accidentally to the party, where she had nobody belonging to her. Neither had these two little people, apparently. All the other young guests had come with mothers, aunts, or nurses ; but these, Miss Waldershare had observed, had walked in, walked up-stairs to take their things

off, and walked down again, hand-in-hand, quite alone.

The two little faces, unlike, and yet with a certain family look which satisfied her as to their relationship, touched her more than all the merry faces round the table. Particularly so when dangerous dainties circulated round it, and the boy would look appealingly to the girl, who smiled back either a "No" or a "Yes." But both were given smilingly and accepted obediently. He was a big, handsome boy, much bigger and handsomer than his sister, with a soft, good-natured, rather weak expression: whereas she was small, dark, thin, with sharp, firm features; an "old" face rather, which might almost have been called plain but for the look of love in her eyes, and the sweet decision of her mouth. All the better, since the boy, pretty as he was, seemed of an undecided nature; as if it were almost a relief to have somebody to settle everything for him.

So at least thought Miss Waldershare, amused to notice how character shows itself even at ten years old.

"You are about ten, I suppose, my dear," said she to the little girl, "and a sensible girl you are, too, not to let your brother eat too much plum-cake. And he is a good boy to mind

what you say," added she, patting the handsome head, which had dropped disconsolately when, for the third time, the tempting dish was allowed to pass.

"We are both ten, ma'am" (children were always taught to say "ma'am" and "sir" in those days), "we are twins, though I am so little, and he is so big and tall. I am obliged to be very careful what he eats. He is not as strong as he looks, and he does not like being ill or taking physic."

"Nobody does, I think. But he is a lucky boy to have such a wise little sister."

"I am his little mother," answered the child, in a grave, old-fashioned way. "Mamma told me I was to be his little mother till she came back again."

"Is she away from home, then?"

"A long way from home—in India. She has been gone two years and a month. It will be four years and eleven months before she and papa are back again."

"Four years, ten months, and two weeks—we counted yesterday, Dor," corrected the little boy—to which the sister assented, looking quite pleased, and saying that "he was always so good at arithmetic."

"And what was it he called you?" asked Miss

Waldershare, more and more interested, yet not liking to seem too curious, as she thought the ordinary reticence of politeness ought to be observed with children as much as with grown-up folks.

The little girl laughed. "Oh, Dor — or Dormouse — or Dor-beetle — I have lots of names. But my right name is Dorcas. Rather ugly, is it not? But then his is a very pretty one — Cyprian. Mamma said he was always to be called Cyprian in full. She is very fond of him. She thinks there never was such a boy." This was said in a confidential whisper, as the child's heart warmed instinctively to the motherly, childless heart of her questioner.

Somebody now called upon Miss Waldershare to start a game, and she was separated from her two small friends, and swamped in the general vortex for an hour or two; at the end of which time, however, she had contrived to find out all that was to be found out concerning Dorcas and Cyprian.

Their parents, though remotely connected with the little town, where everybody knew everybody, had never been seen there, having gone to Calcutta, or Benares, or Bombay — nobody was quite sure where — leaving behind these children with three old ladies, distant re-

lations, who resided here. The giver of the party scarcely knew the names of her small guests—they were merely “the next-door children,” invited “for kindness.”

And, though both their hostess and everybody else was really kind to them—or would have been, had they mixed themselves up easily with the rest—still, to the very end of the evening, Miss Waldershare noticed a certain forlornness in the little pair, who went about together, or sat close together, hand-in-hand, as if unused to general society, and belonging specially to one another, and not to anybody else; so much so that even she, generally so successful in shaking up a party together, found them a difficult element to deal with.

First, the boy was so exceedingly shy that there was no doing anything with him. He would not, or could not, play at any game—not even simple “hunt the slipper,” or merry “kiss-in-the-ring.” He refused absolutely to give or to “cry” a forfeit; and when, tempted by the fun and laughing, he was at last lured into blind-man’s-buff, he somehow got into everybody’s way, and being accidentally knocked down, burst into such a piteous howl that he was obliged to be carried off at once up-stairs.

There, ever so long after, Miss Waldershare

found him, with his faithful little sister sitting patiently beside him, in the deserted bedroom.

"Is he hurt?" the lady asked, anxiously.

"Oh no; only he had rather stay here."

"But why should you stay, my little girl? You like fun; I saw you playing very merrily. Go back to the rest."

"Without Cyprian?" said Dorcas, with wide-open eyes; as if such an idea produced in her mind simple astonishment. "Oh dear, no! He does not like being alone. Mamma told me never to leave Cyprian."

"That settles the point," said Miss Waldershare, smiling; and went down-stairs again. But several times she returned, and tried to coax the little fellow back to the gay party below. However, he was either too shy, or too sulky, or too much accustomed to have everything his own way, with his "little mother" for his devoted slave; for though once or twice he yielded to persuasion so far as to go to the top of the stairs — being evidently of a soft and yielding disposition — still he always came back again, and sheltered himself behind his sister, as if, though so much less than himself, she was his natural refuge.

For Dorcas, she did her utmost, poor little woman, to get him into a better mind; and

when all failed — and the boy's gentle obstinacy and hesitating sweetness were most difficult to make anything out of — she soothed him, she comforted him, she apologized for him. Finally, when all the kindly inquirers left him and her together, she sat beside the little fellow in the somewhat dreary bedroom, listening to the noisy rout down-stairs, for very nearly two hours.

“Would you like to go and have a dance? They are dancing, you hear?”

Dorcas looked up at Miss Waldershare with a world of grateful pleasure in her eyes. She was not pretty; but she had that sort of airy, well-set figure which seems made for dancing. Already her little feet were beating time to the music.

“Do go, child,” said the kind lady. “Run away; I will stay with your brother.”

Poor little “Dor” was almost off — the music was playing such a lovely tune, nearly as enticing as that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin — when she felt her dress caught by Cyprian's exploring hand.

She sat down again. “*He* doesn't dance — he doesn't like it. Thank you — no. Perhaps I had better stay with Cyprian. It will soon be time for going home. Mamma said we were

never to be out after dark, on account of Cyprian. He catches cold so soon."

"But this is a warm summer night," began Miss Waldershare, feeling inclined to argue the point; and doubtful of the wisdom of allowing one child to sacrifice everything to another child. Still, there was something so pathetic in this literal obedience to the wishes of the far-away mother — this entire devotion to a rather trying little brother — that the kind stranger lady, unto whom it had pleased Heaven to give neither the sweetness nor the bitterness of family duties, held her tongue and remonstrated no more.

When next time she went after them — for amid all the fun and frolic down-stairs she was haunted by a vision of the little forlorn twins sitting in the deserted bedroom all alone — she found her birds were flown.

Dorcas, she learned, had quietly crept away with her little brother, not waiting for supper; though she had been seen standing for several minutes at the hall door till she could say good-by "politely" to the hostess.

"Mamma said we were never to go away from any visit without thanking the lady of the house for our pleasant evening," she had explained to somebody; and been laughed at a good deal for her "old-fashioned" ways.

No doubt, the family thought, she learned them from those three prim elderly ladies with whom she must lead such a dull life, "to say nothing of that fanciful, disagreeable little brother, to whom she gives up everything, apparently never thinking of herself at all. Poor little soul !

But Miss Waldershare, who had seen many a child who thought of itself a great deal, who was everybody's pet, from whom nobody ever expected anything — and certainly never got it — turn out to be not only the most unpleasant but most unhappy of young people, did not altogether pity "Dor." The child had at least — so one of the other children said — "somebody to make a fuss over."

But having a firm belief in compensation — also some sadly humble belief in herself as an instrument of the same — for there are those to whom Heaven seems to deny all personal joys, in order that they should be better able to make other people happy — Miss Waldershare set her benevolent wits to work to invent some small pleasure for these two children, whose pleasures were so few.

Fate, kindly seized upon, often turns kind. The very next day every vacant wall in the town broke out into an eruption of huge handbills,

announcing that Signor Bianchini, the celebrated pyrotechnist, would on a certain evening have a grand display in the High Street ; and would end by walking—under patronage of the Worshipful the Mayor—from one of the windows in the Town-hall to a window opposite, on the tight-rope, amid a shower of rockets and Roman candles.

Now, the noble art of pyrotechny was then in its infancy, and Blondin the Great had neither been born nor thought of. Consequently, the little town was much excited ; and on the rumor being spread that the hero of the day was no other than a certain Jem White—who had once fled the town in disgrace for throwing crackers and squibs on Gunpowder Plot day, to return in honor and glory as the celebrated Signor Bianchini—a touch of romance added to the interest. All the towns-people, high and low—the low in the street, and the high upon every available shop-front and first-floor window—assembled to witness the show.

Miss Waldershare, putting off her departure for a day, engaged a tiny room with a balconied window, over a bookseller's shop ; and thither, after much perturbation and great hesitation on the part of the three old ladies, she succeeded in carrying off her little friends, Dorcas and

Cyprian Hall. There, by seven o'clock on a July night, she established herself, with the twins one on each side of her, which arrangement, however, was soon modified.

"May he come beside me, ma'am? If there should be a — a noise — fireworks do make a

noise sometimes, I think? — he will like to be closer beside me. He is rather timid, you see," added, with a half-apologetic air, the "little mother."



She was not timid—not even

when the balcony gave a sudden crack, and with involuntary instinct she used all her small strength to push Cyprian back upon the safe window-ledge, remaining outside herself. But it was a false alarm, though it frightened Miss Waldershare a little, and Cyprian very much — until there was proved to be no danger, and the trio settled themselves to entire enjoyment of the sight.

What a sight it was! One of the many chil-

dren who saw it remembers it still: even after five-and-forty years! the proud delight of sitting up till eleven at night, and being initiated into the mysteries of the nocturnal world—the streets, lit with oil-lamps (gas being still unknown there), the houses, dim and tall, and the quiet starry sky overhead, such a contrast to the noisy crowd below. Then that black platform, whence all the wonderful show was to come—what dozens of young eyes gazed on it in eager suspense! till, punctual to the appointed minute, there shot forth, with a whiz, a whir, and a glare, the first rocket. Up it went—making everybody jump, and Cyprian utter an audible cry—up like a live creature, flying, or rather shooting, right into the sky, no one could exactly see where, till it fell down, in a shower of fiery rain, on the very heads of the crowd, who screamed and laughed, and ran hither and thither; trying, some to avoid, some to snatch at the blazing sparks.

Another, and another, and another—each rising higher and falling steadier than the last; then a grand illumination of “Roman candles,” showing all the faces of the people below, and lighting up the architecture of the old Town-hall, which the townsfolk were so proud of. Finally, a most wonderful set piece—a wheel of

light, which kept turning and turning, every moment more rapidly, throwing out a shower of sparks all round.

"The most beautiful thing we ever saw in all our life—isn't it, Cyprian?" cried Dor. "What can it be?"

"A Catherine-wheel," said Miss Waldershare, smiling at the "we" and the "our life" in the singular number—so natural to the twins.

"A Catherine-wheel?" repeated the sister, meditatively. "I wonder has that anything to do with St. Catherine? Mamma had a picture of her leaning against a wheel. She was so pretty—but with a sweet, sad kind of face, something like mamma's."

"You have a pretty mamma, then?" said Miss Waldershare, ignoring the other adjective. "And you have heard of St. Catherine—and very likely about Raffaelle, who painted her?"

"Oh, yes," brightening up extremely. "I like to read all I can about painters, for I am so fond of drawing. I often try to draw. Mamma says I shall learn properly some day, and then I can teach Cyprian."

"Does Cyprian like reading?"

"N—no," with a slight hesitation. "Indeed he has not time for reading. He learns Latin, you know. So I read for both of us, and then

I can tell him anything interesting. It saves him so much trouble."

"I don't like trouble, and I can't imagine how anybody could like reading," said Cyprian, with his most attractive smile.

"But he likes writing, and he writes so well — small hand — and a great deal better than I," eagerly said the little sister. "And he can read written-hand beautifully — makes out every word in mamma's letters. If you knew how delightful are mamma's letters — as interesting as a story-book. We get one every mail, and we look for it days before it comes. It has been coming for a week now. Perhaps we shall find it when we get home to-night."

"I hope so," said the lady, with a slight tremble in her voice. Never, either as child or woman, had Miss Waldershare got any mother's letters.

"If it does come, and if she cared to call to-morrow, perhaps we might let her see it," whispered Cyprian to his sister, who slightly hesitated, as if that were a privilege too great for any mortal creature.

"To-morrow, my dears, I shall be miles and miles away. I shall not see you for a very long time, I fear."

"What a pity! Because I shall tell mamma

all about you — we always tell her everything — and if she knew how kind you have been to us both, she would let me show you her letters. But I should like to ask her first ; and it will be six months before we get the answer.”

“Of course it will,” said Miss Waldershare, thinking of the great gulf of time and space between mother and children — of the letters received ignorantly, months after date, on both sides — and of how sad it was, that with such tender love between children and parents, the one should grow up, and the other should grow old in such a long separation that when they did meet again it would be almost as strangers.

“But come, my dears, the fireworks are beginning again. And there is Signor Bianchini on the tight-rope. See how beautifully he balances himself with that long pole. Would you like to be a tight-rope dancer, Cyprian?”

“He is to be a gentleman, and go to college, and then go out to India to papa,” said Dorcas, with a little touch of pride. And when the boy, boy-like, clapped his hands with delight, watching the *ci-devant* Jem White make his perilous journey over the upturned heads of the crowd, the more sensitive girl shuddered, and turned pale.

“Would you like to go in, and not look any more?” said Miss Waldershare, kindly.

"No, thank you; something might happen — Cyprian might overbalance himself. No, I would rather stay by Cyprian."

And though still white and trembling, she did stay till the very last. But, besides the buns and oranges, a glass of wine had to be administered to the child before she was able to walk home. She seemed but a fragile little thing, despite her spirit and — only the word was not known in those days — her "pluck."

The last of the fireworks shot up — a sheaf of flame, hissing and crackling — above the Town-hall and the old church-tower, right into the silent stars; there was a shout of ecstatic cheering from the crowd, and a final "sending round the hat," which ceremony had been gone through several times already, from window to window, Dorcas apologizing sadly that she had no penny to drop into it — "But mamma told us that papa was not rich, and that we were not to spend more pennies than we could help." And then the signor bowed his thanks — in a theatrical attitude, beside the very biggest of Catherine-wheels — and the crowd began to separate. The night's delight was ended.

Miss Waldershare walked through the fast-thinning street with her two *protégés*, one in each hand. Cyprian, no longer shy, was chat-

tering like a magpie, but Dorcas, who had hitherto done the talking, now began to be silent, evidently very tired. Her friend would have liked to take her up and carry her; she was strong enough and the child small enough; but Dorcas was so astonished at the idea that she gave it up, and merely helped the poor little girl as well as she could till they reached the Terrace.

"I will just wait and see if you have got your letter, and then I will bid you good-by. I am going away to-morrow morning," said Miss Waldershare, with a slight regret at her heart. Her life was almost as solitary as that of these little people.

"Is that the children? Bring them in at once to me," said a sharp voice behind the sleepy maid-servant who opened the door.

"Oh, Miss Moffatt, is that you? Have you got mamma's letters?"

"There are letters."

"I am so glad!" said Miss Waldershare. She kissed the two children, and walked quickly away.

By one of those accidental delays which visit us all, she, however, did not leave next morning. Business — other people's business, of course — rose up, which detained her nearly a

week; and being rather troublesome business, her mind was so full of it that she hardly gave a thought to the twins, Dorcas and Cyprian, till, coming home from church, she passed the end of the Terrace, and saw two little figures walking down it, slowly and quietly, hand-in-hand, two little black figures, so far as her short sight enabled her to judge, which made her at first think it could not possibly be they. Nevertheless, she felt a strong inclination to call and say good-by over again—for she was going abroad, on a mission of mercy, with a sick friend, and it might be months, nay years, before she was in England again.

So she sent up her card, asking to see “little Miss Hall.”

The servant, looking rather surprised, showed her into an empty parlor, where she waited several minutes, and then the two poor little children, still hand-in-hand, walked in.

Truly, “poor” children, having sustained the utmost loss a child can know.

They were dressed in black from head to foot—not even a white collar—and their faces were very grave, Cyprian’s being rosy still, but out of Dorcas’s every ray of color had departed. Her eyes looked as if she had been crying all day long, and the voice she spoke in, though quiet, was forced and strange.

"How do you do, ma'am? It is kind of you to come and see us."

"My poor little girl, what has happened?"

"Mamma is dead!" cried Cyprian, with a burst of tears.

"Yes, our mamma is dead," said Dorcas, but without crying. She seemed to have wept all her tears away.

"But — the letter?"

"It was from papa. He said mamma had been dead a week. That is two months ago. So it is two months and a week since we had any mamma. I can't understand it at all," added the boy, shaking his head in a forlorn sort of way.

His sister put her arm round him, and drew him to her, at which he began sobbing afresh. In truth, they all wept together; Miss Waldershare never thinking till afterward how strange it was that she, who had had no tears for many a year, should shed them now, over a woman whom she had never seen and scarcely heard of.

She wondered what kind of person the father was, and even went so far as to ask if she might see his letter.

"Oh yes" (no hesitation now). "But I remember Miss Moffatt has it. She said she should keep it, lest papa might forget his promise, and take us away from here."

"Would you wish to go?"

"Oh no. It doesn't matter. The Miss Mof-fatts are very kind to us. Everything goes on as usual, except for mamma's letters. She has been a year away, and this is the first time the mail ever came in without bringing us one of mamma's letters."

The child spoke in a dull, sad, almost complaining tone ; evidently even she did not yet realize — how difficult it is for any of us to realize ! — that sudden pause of death-silence.

"Did your mamma ever say — had you any idea — ?" began Miss Waldershare, and stopped. What use was it to question ? The plain, hard fact was there — the children were motherless.

"And you are going abroad, too?" said Dorcas, when she had sat a good while, holding the kind hand whose firm clasp was the only way in which Miss Waldershare could express sympathy. "We shall never see you again. It will be just like mamma's going — only you have no little children to leave behind."

"No, nobody."

"Mamma would not have left us if she could have helped it — she told me so ; but she had to go with papa. She said so once — I was not to tell Cyprian, and I almost forgot it myself till now — it seemed so impossible ; but she said —" Dorcas hesitated.

"Said what, my dear ?"

"That even if she died we were not to mind, as she would not be much farther away from us than when she was in India, perhaps not so far. What did she mean?"

Miss Waldershare tried to explain; tried to put into the child's heart, without giving any impression of fear or pain, that heavenly consolation of the continual nearness of the dead, of the narrow barrier that for all pure and loving souls exists between the life here and the life everlasting.

"I understand," Dorcas said, at last. "And that is why we were to remember what she used to say to us, and do what she wished us to do, just as much as if she were here beside us. It will be much the same now. Do you hear what the lady says? Do you understand her, Cyprian?"

Poor Cyprian! He had ceased crying now, and was squatting on the hearth-rug, playing with two kittens, quite merry and content. None the less, possibly all the more, did Miss Waldershare say, "Poor Cyprian!"

Her time was limited, and she rose to go.

"But I shall not forget you, dear. I shall write to you now and then."

"Oh, how nice! We never get letters from anybody, except mamma." Here came a sudden

shudder of recollection and a wild look, almost of despair. "I forgot. We shall never have any more letters from mamma. What shall we do? Oh, Cyprian, Cyprian!"

That cry, so shrill, so full of intolerable agony, made the little boy spring to his feet.

"Dor — Dor, what is the matter? Please be quiet. You frighten me so — you make me so miserable."

Then the sister, with a violent effort, checked what was growing into an almost hysterical scream. She put her arms round Cyprian, and hid her face on his shoulder till the sobs ceased, and she lifted up her face, deadly white, indeed, but quite composed.

"Yes, he is right; I must be quiet. He has nobody to take care of him but me now. Thank you, Miss Waldershare, and we shall be delighted to get your letters.

And Cyprian shall write—he writes so very well, you know," with a faint smile, as she put up her lips for a farewell kiss.

It had not quite vanished, that piteous smile, even when Miss Waldershare caught her last



glimpse of the twins, standing watching her down the Terrace, with their faces pressed against the window-pane. Two rather forlorn figures, with their mourning clothes, and grave, sad looks; but they were two—and they stood close together, hand-in-hand, as usual. Also, Cyprian had his head safely nestled into the shoulder of his “little mother.”

The dead mother—could she have beheld them—might have felt that life was not altogether hopeless to her children.



Part II TWENTY YEARS OLD

MISS WALDERSHARE did not return to England for ten years.

Part of that time she spent with her friend, very peacefully, even happily; and when the invalid needed her no more there were many others who did need her. That sweet, sunny nook of southern France was always full of sick

and sorrowful folk, come to die, or to watch their beloved die, beside the blue Mediterranean. Consequently, this rich and kind-hearted English lady, who had no home ties, never wanted—who ever does want?—an object whereon to expend her time, her money, and her sympathies. And this was well. Sad she might sometimes be; but she was never either idle or lonely; as in truth no woman ever is, unless she wishes to be the one, and deserves, by her unlovableness, to be the other.

Miss Waldershare thus lingered on, year after year, in the place whither she had accidentally drifted, until it almost became a second home. She might never have come home at all—that is, to England—had not business called her to the little town where she had happened to be born, but where, nevertheless, she had not a single living tie. And in ten years even her few acquaintances there had so entirely disappeared that there was not a house she cared to go to. She put up at the inn. And in spite of what the cynic writes about the man who, going through life, finds “his warmest welcome at an inn,” this well-beloved maiden lady was so accustomed to find every door open to her and every face a friendly face, that the inn appeared just a little solitary, even dull.

Having transacted her business, she wandered about, noticing how many new houses had sprung up on the skirts of the old town; but the place itself remained unchanged. There were the same names over the shops in the High Street; the usual market went on just below the Town-hall, from the windows of which Signor Bianchini had taken his memorable tight-rope promenade, watched by herself and the little twins, Dorcas and Cyprian Hall, on the night of the fireworks. The fatal night — how long they must have remembered it! — when, on coming home, they got the news of their mother's death.

"Poor little souls!" she thought, recalling that time. Familiar as she was with sorrow, the expression of the children's faces, as she last saw them looking out of the parlor window that Sunday afternoon, had never gone out of her mind. "But they cannot be children now. They must nearly be grown up by this time. I wonder what has become of them."

For though she had faithfully written, and received, at long intervals, several letters in return, not from Cyprian — "he had so little time," his sister said — but from Dorcas, still ten years is a long period to keep up any correspondence, especially a foreign one, and with such very small

correspondents. Miss Waldershare was scarcely surprised when it gradually ceased. Two years at least had passed since she had had any tidings of the young Halls.

She was a shy and sensitive person, curiously so for a middle-aged woman of good position, whom nobody would have expected to have any doubt of herself at all. But she had — though circumstances rather than natural temperament had caused this. She never liked to intrude herself upon anybody, especially the young, and was only too ready to accept the fact that people had forgotten her. Therefore, even when she passed the end of the Terrace where the twins used to live, she hesitated, and was some minutes in making up her mind to knock at Miss Moffatt's door.

There it was, the brass plate with "The Misses Moffatt" — who had begun by keeping a school — staring her in the face. She lingered, looked round, might even have gone back again, but that a lady and gentleman crossed the road to her. He tall, fair, handsome ; the girl hanging on his arm (people usually walked arm-in-arm in those days) small, dark, and decidedly plain. Miss Waldershare might have recognized them had she not forgotten the lapse of time. But they knew her at once, and called her by name.

"We had no idea you were in England. When did you come? Why did you not let us know?" said the young man, impulsively; and, in spite of the incipient beard, she recalled at once the pretty boy-face of Cyprian Hall. His sister — yes, of course, it was his sister — his "little mother" that used to be. She looked like it still — being both graver and older in appearance than her twin.

"Then you have not quite forgotten me?" said the lady, pleased, as most middle aged ladies are, at being recognized after so long a time.

"Oh! Dor knew you at once. Dor never forgets anybody."

And though Dor scarcely said a word, leaving all the talk to her brother, who seemed to have a great gift that way, the pleasure in her eyes, and the warm grasp of her hand, proved to Miss Waldershare the truth of that character. Yes, Dorcas Hall looked like a person "who never forgot anybody."

"You will come in, of course? It is just tea-time; and Miss Moffatt will be glad to see you, or any friend of ours. There is only one Miss Moffatt now. The other two are dead; poor old dears! so Dor and I have almost the house to ourselves — except for Mr. Moffatt, a

nephew of theirs ; but he is a great scholar, and as quiet as a tame cat. Bless me ! I hope he didn't hear me. There he is."

And Cyprian nodded to a half-bald head, with bright eyes, which eyes had evidently been watching them from the window.

"Very quiet, but a good fellow, for all that," continued the youth, with a slightly patronizing air. "He and I shall be off to Oxford in two months more, and then Dor will have to make the best of it alone."

Dor smiled, as if quite accustomed to "make the best of it," and they entered the house together.

When she took Miss Waldershare up-stairs to arrange her dress a little — for the "old maid" was just a shade "particular" as to her appearance — Dorcas explained, with a look of proud pleasure, that her brother was just going up for his matriculation examination.

"Papa was a long time in consenting ; he was never at college himself, and does not see why a young man should go at all, especially one who might be a Calcutta merchant. But Cyprian does not want to be a merchant, and does not care to go out to Calcutta."

"No, indeed," cried Cyprian, meeting them on the staircase and overhearing ; "papa has

married again, and there is a horrid lot of children. I had much rather stop at home with Dor. She makes me work — that is, if anybody could do it. But I'm an idle fellow — I shall never do much, anyhow; shall I, Dor?" said he, with that charming frankness and engaging contrition which, in some people, seems equivalent to doing what they ought to do. They feel as if confessing a fault were almost as good as amending it.

"You will do more by and by," said the sister, with a sad expression flitting through her smile. "Cyprian has had a great deal to contend against, Miss Waldershare. Papa could not afford to send him to a public school, so he was obliged to get educated here; and when at last he went to a clergyman to study — he — he came back again."

"Was sent back," laughed the young fellow, with charming candor, which, however, sent the hot blood into his sister's face. "But I am sure if I told the whole story to Miss Waldershare she would agree with me that it was a confounded shame."

"Tea is waiting," said Dorcas, hastily, and then introduced the bald-headed man — not such a very old man either — as "Mr. Moffatt, from Oxford, who has been so very kind to Cyprian."

"Kindness itself!" added Cyprian. "I am sure, if I pass, it is his coaching I have to thank for it."

"You must pass," said Mr. Moffatt; and "He will pass," said Dorcas.

"Oh, don't lecture! I hate lecturing. But I mean to be such a good boy — some day."

That day, however, had been evidently long of coming. Not that he was in the least a "naughty" boy. On the contrary, Miss Waldershare liked him extremely, and could quite understand how everybody liked him too. He had that invincible attractiveness, born of a pleasant inward conviction that he did attract, which makes some people so charming. They throw themselves on you with the simplicity of a child to whom no one has ever said a hard word; they are quite sure of your regard — so sure that you have not the heart to refuse it. Before she had been an hour in the room with him, Miss Waldershare felt a weak consciousness that, were he to ask her, she would do almost anything for young Cyprian Hall.

And his "little mother."

"Yes, I am still his 'little mother,'" Dorcas answered, smiling, to some question which Miss Waldershare put on bidding good-by — not a farewell at all, for she had been already per-

sualed by Cyprian to remain in the town a few days longer ("just to comfort poor Dor after I am gone," said he, with a pleasing conviction that she would want comfort, and that nobody could make up to her for the loss of himself — which, perhaps, was not untrue). "He needed a 'little mother' more than most boys; and, besides, mamma told me to take care of him."

"Mamma said that" — "Mamma wished that," seemed, even after all these years, to be the invisible law of right to the orphans, evidently as completely orphans as if they had been left without either father or mother. And Dorcas, with her silentness and somewhat careworn face, much older looking than that of her twin, seemed to have taken upon herself all the duties and anxieties of a mother.

Altogether, Miss Waldershare quitted the little household — where Miss Moffatt, its nominal head, had never once appeared (she was an invalid, and Miss Hall managed everything) — with a somewhat heavy heart. The brightest bit, however — she being of a rather "sentimental" turn — was in the fancy she took for Mr. Moffatt's honest countenance, and the pleasure she had in watching how he seemed to do everything he could think of for quaint, plain, gentle Dorcas Hall.

She saw a good deal of both him and the twins during the next two days, and after Cyprian had started for Oxford in the highest spirits, and without a doubt concerning his "exam.," she and his sister had much talk together. But Dorcas was not very confidential, not even on the subject of Cyprian. In all she said there seemed to be some *arrière pensée*, a sense of past disappointment and future doubt, almost amounting to fear, which, putting together fragments which she rather betrayed than told, gave a still deeper uneasiness to the older and more experienced woman.

Cyprian did not much care for reading; found study difficult; his sister had taught herself Latin, a bit of Greek, and even something of mathematics, in order to teach him. He had never had any systematic education of any kind — well, that was not his fault, but Miss Waldershare knew that real students, true workers, who mean to make their way in the world, whether boy or girl, will, when they get into their teens, begin to educate themselves. And self-education is perhaps the soundest of all.

But Cyprian was twenty, and had not begun earnestly to study yet. If he passed even the preliminary examination for Oxford, it would be, Dorcas was forced to own, chiefly owing to

the excellent and gratuitous "coaching" given him for the last eight weeks by Mr. Moffatt.

"But oh! Miss Waldershare, you see how much my poor boy has had to fight against!" pleaded the sister, in fond deprecation. "Even his good looks and his winning ways have been dangerous to him, because everybody is always admiring him and inviting him out. Yet he is as steady as a rock—never gets into any ill-ways, late hours, or the like, and he is always so easily led, and so good and affectionate. To part from him will be dreadful, but I shall be content if I know he is all right, and if I can sometimes go and see him—Oxford men like to have their sisters visiting them, Mr. Moffatt said; only it must be pretty sisters—not such as me."

Miss Waldershare asked, gravely, "if it were Mr. Moffatt who said that?" because she herself thought the little dark-eyed face and dainty figure made up a sister quite well-looking enough for any college "man."

"Well, then," said Dorcas, laughing, "I really will go up next Commemoration. It will be so grand to take a walk with Cyprian in his cap and gown! How handsome he will look—how proud mamma would have been! Mamma always said Cyprian must go to Oxford."

So talked they—the elder and the younger woman—in the dim evening light; waiting for the letter—there were no telegraphs then—which was to bring the important news.

At last it came: two letters arrived—the second being from Mr. Moffatt. Dorcas laid it aside, and opened Cyprian's.

Only one line—Miss Waldershare could see. She saw also that Dorcas's poor little hands fell helplessly on her lap—she had instinctively sat down—and then were clasped together in a mute acceptance of the inevitable.

"I always expected it—he could not help it. He says he did his best. My poor boy!"

"Poor girl!" Miss Waldershare felt inclined to say; but she said nothing—only kissed her silently. Then Dorcas leaned her head on her friend's shoulder and wept bitterly.

"Tears won't do," she said, at last, drying them. "He will be here to-night, no doubt—or to-morrow morning—for he will have to go out to India at once. Papa said he must, if he failed in his matriculation. He has lost only too much time already; and we are wholly dependent upon papa. Oh, my poor boy!"

She wrung her hands, oblivious of everything—even of the second letter—which Miss Waldershare proposed to open and read.



"DEAR MISS HALL, — 'Plucked' is a hard word, but Cyprian must not let his courage sink. Many a man has succeeded in the world after being plucked. Perhaps, after all, he is scarcely fit for university life, and this may be for the best in the end. Try to believe so — though I know it is hard. We shall be with you almost as soon as this letter.

"Yours sincerely, JAMES MOFFATT."

"How kind he is!" said Miss Waldershare.

"Yes, very kind."

And so he was — as kind as Miss Waldershare herself — for the two took counsel together over the helpless sister many a time during the melancholy days which ensued, when it was necessary to arrange everything for Cyprian's departure, and for the parting of the twins, literally for the first time in their lives — except that brief attempt at tutoring of which everybody had said as little as possible.

So great was the despair of both at first that Miss Waldershare suggested Dorcas's going out with him to India.

The girl shook her head. "No; it would be too expensive. It would vex papa — he only sent home money for one. Besides" — with a sad casting down of the eyes — "papa does not want me. He never did want us, you know."

Miss Waldershare asked no explanation of what was evidently some family difficulty. She saw that Cyprian must go, and Dorcas stay behind — at least for the present. It was very sad — so sad that, being more accustomed to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, she put off a grand London visit, and remained still a few days more in the dull little town, where she knew not a creature but these, her sorrowful friends.

It was a terrible time. Most people nowadays know it — have witnessed or gone through it — when some young member of the family has to be sent away abroad — an agony sharp as death even under the best of circumstances. Coming nearer and nearer each day to the fatal day was almost, as Cyprian declared, “like going to be hanged.”

He felt it very much at first, poor boy ! grew quite thin and white, and could never look at Dorcas without the tears coming into his eyes. But by and by the excitement of preparation comforted him a little. He became such an important person in his little circle, and even in the town, where seldom such a thing was heard of as a young man “going out to India.” Even his outfit created a secondary interest, and also his trunks, which the shop-keeper exhibited at

the door, marked, in white letters, "Cyprian Hall, Esq., Calcutta." There was a pleasant and consolatory side even to this cruel parting.

"But it shall not be for long, that I am determined on!" said Cyprian, with great energy. "As soon as ever I am settled I will send out for Dor, and we will live together — bachelor brother and maiden sister — and be as happy as the day is long; won't we, 'little mother'?"

She half smiled, half sobbed at the word. "Cyprian always sees the bright side of things — and he is right. Don't you think so, Miss Waldershare?"

"Yes," answered the elder woman, but thought also how little *he* thought who it was that had invariably made life turn its sunny side to him, if possible, even though somebody else had to walk in the shade.

So much so that even the last day was not such a very dreary day at the Terrace, where Miss Waldershare paid her final call at least forty-eight hours before Cyprian's departure. With her constitutional shyness, she thought it best not to stay to the very end, not being a relative, nor exactly a "friend of the family." And, judging by herself, she considered that, after the two were really gone — Mr. Moffatt was to see the poor fellow off from Liverpool,

and then come back, *en route* for Oxford, with the latest news — after that it would be easier for Dorcas to be left quite alone.

Therefore she bade the twins a cheerful good-by, reminded them both how young they were, and how the world was all before them, and their lot in their own hands, to do what they liked with it almost ; for at twenty, with health, strength, work to do, and the capacity and will to do it, what young man or young woman need feel hopeless or forlorn ? She “preached” a little, yet feeling all the while how vain “preaching” is, and how each young soul must buy its own experience in its own way.

And then she kissed and blessed them both — poor young things ! — now going through the sharpest experience of their existence, and feeling their anguish with all the passionate intensity of youth, to whom every sorrow appears at the time like a sorrow eternal.

She understood this — and them : the solitary woman to whom life was no longer a vista of the future, but a dream of the past. And then she went away, walking rather slowly and sadly, and trying hard to believe all the hopeful things she had been saying a few minutes before to both Cyprian and Dorcas, when she was overtaken by a quick footstep : it was Mr. Moffatt's.

"Allow me to walk home with you," he said. "Oh," seeing she hesitated, "that is no matter! They don't want me."

A fact which Miss Waldershare could not deny — which, indeed, she had noticed, and been almost sorry for : feeling that the twins did not half appreciate the kindness of a friend so much older than themselves, and so familiar that they both took his devotion for granted. But she, who knew the world better, respected it as a thing only too rare.

He walked on beside her, talking a good deal about them both, or rather about Cyprian. He did not seem to consider Dorcas as a person to be discussed at all — not even her sorrow, which she bore so silently that her friends instinctively were silent too.

"Do you think there is the making of a man in that boy?" said Miss Waldershare, at last, when they were face to face at the hotel door.

"I hope there is — I think there is — if only he falls into good hands. There are some people, you know, who make themselves and their career; others are made by circumstances or influences. It remains to be seen under what category we may place Cyprian Hall."

"And Dorcas?" said Miss Waldershare, looking fixedly in the eyes of the good, honest

man — a curious, penetrating, half-sad, but exceedingly tender look, not unbefitting a kind old woman who had once been young.

Mr. Moffatt's sallow face blushed all over, but he unhesitatingly returned the gaze.

"Dorcas cares more for that boy's little finger than for any one alive. I know that. Still, I shall take care of her. I am a poor man — a very poor man — but I shall manage somehow to take care of her."

"I believe that," was the cordial answer. "God bless you. Good by."

Six months after this, business again called Miss Waldershare to her native town, and of course she went at once to the Terrace to see Dorcas Hall. Only to look at her, having already heard by letter all the news of Cyprian; exceedingly good news, so that she was hardly surprised at the gentle content of his sister's face, and the more than usually hopeful tone in which Dorcas spoke of him and everything.

"Papa" — that long invisible, seldom-named father — had been quite glad to see his eldest son; he was growing elderly, with a lot of young children. Cyprian might become of the greatest use to him. Cyprian had taken kindly to business, found it rather "amusing" than otherwise, and liked the gay Calcutta life, where, no

doubt, he was as great a favorite as he had always been everywhere. He was poor, certainly, for his father only allowed him a clerk's salary, probably all he deserved at first, but he hoped to "make it do," and to earn more by and by.

"And what does he plan about bringing you out to him? You must have a dull life here with Miss Moffatt, and he knows it. What does he say?"

"Nothing," answered the sister, casting down her eyes. Then, suddenly, in the old apologetic way, "I did not expect anything else. Cyprian used to leave me to do all the planning. He is content with the present. He never looks ahead in any way. I know that."

"But, surely, as soon as he can, he will send for you or fetch you?"

Dorcas again cast down her eyes, and a vivid blush overspread her face.

"Perhaps — Mr. Moffatt might not quite like me to go."





PART III

THIRTY YEARS OLD



THE second decade of Miss Waldershare's acquaintance with the twin brother and sister differed a little from the first one. It flew faster—years do fly much faster between twenty and thirty than between ten and twenty. How then must it be between fifty-five and sixty-five?—which she was now: no longer an “elderly,” but an old lady.

A fact which she had at last learned patiently to recognize. Like other active, energetic, and unselfish women, she had resisted fate to the

last ; maintained her youth and her bright-heartedness ; refused to succumb to many a cruel shock ; resolved to "die with harness on her back." But the wear and tear of life gradually overcame her. After one bad illness she suddenly found out that she could not revive as heretofore — that she had grown, to all intents and purposes, an old woman.

After that she had to learn to be quiet, to let others do her work instead of doing it all herself ; content if she were still the head, though not the hands as well ; and more than content, thankful, to see the young rising up to do her duties for her, and to work in her stead, against the time when her place should know her no more.

Something on this wise she wrote to her friend Dorcas Hall. For they had long become

"A pair of friends
Affectionate and true,"

in spite of the difference in their ages, and the great gaps of time that intervened between their meetings, owing to the busy life of both. But they corresponded regularly ; and Dorcas's simple history, as told in her letters, became the strongest interest Miss Waldershare had. Especially so, when for this active woman all the pleasures of existence slowly dwindled down to

her own house and garden ; and at last, during the winter months, to the limits of four silent walls.

Dorcas's letters — they are now arranged and labelled and packed together in a box, to go some day possibly to some rightful owner, if not consigned previously, by still tenderer hands, to that safest receptacle of all treasures — the fire. They began immediately after Cyprian left for India, and were full of him and his doings. Sometimes his letters were enclosed therein — bright, clever, funny, but by no means confidential epistles, if, indeed, he had had anything to confide, even to his "little mother." At first they came every mail, then less frequently, then they stopped entirely for a while ; and Dorcas had to deaden her anxiety by the brief tidings she got of him through father and step-mother.

After that — sudden, startling news ! Cyprian was married — actually married ! at the age of two-and-twenty ; unknown to any one, and to a girl whom nobody had ever heard of. He had met her at some hill-station — a mere child of sixteen — most charming, in spite of a slight touch of the despised Hindoo blood shining through her beautiful brown face. So said Cyprian, who had fallen madly in love, and in three weeks brought her home to Calcutta as his bride.

But the father — irritated, and not without cause, at such an imprudent proceeding — turned him adrift, thus depriving him of his clerk's salary, the only income he had.

"Yet he is so clever — has so many friends — he will speedily find other work," wrote the sister, trying to look on the bright side of things. And it was so, for Cyprian seemed always to fall on his feet. But the breach between him and his father was made — and made for life.

This was Dorcas's agony ; not the marriage : she forgave that. In the heart of the "little mother" jealousy — sisterly jealousy — was impossible.

"He was sure to fall in love ; and to marry early was the best thing that could happen to him. I always told him so. Cyprian could never do without a woman to take care of him. Only I wish he had waited till he had just a little more money — and — I wish he had not vexed papa ! For all else — look at her likeness. Isn't it a sweet face ? My pretty 'sister !' How could he help loving her ? And after all, dear friend, don't you think that love is best ?"

Whether Miss Waldershare did or not — that Dorcas did, she knew. For James Moffatt had just persuaded her to wait indefinite years, till the Fellowship he now held should result in a College living.

"We are not like Cyprian" — and her friend fancied she could almost have seen the smile, half-tender, half-amused, yet just a little sad, with which Dorcas always spoke or wrote of Cyprian — "we can wait. Papa will never need to be angry with us." Which, indeed, was not likely, as Mr. Hall, senior, had always been too indifferent to his daughter to feel either pleasure or displeasure at any of her proceedings.

So time went on ; and Dorcas still lived with Miss Moffatt — upon a very small allowance, apparently ; for she began to supplement it in various silent ways, especially in selling her drawings, which were remarkably good for an amateur. It was a dull life, except in the long vacation, when Mr. Moffatt came to share her devoted care of his infirm old aunt, and to speculate with her on the chances of that College living which was to open all paradise to these simple souls. But more than one living fell in, and was given to somebody else — somebody more "pushing," or with more College influence than honest James Moffatt. Year after year went by, and he was still a Fellow, and Miss Hall a spinster — travelling through her twenties as she had done through her teens — complaining to no one and troubling no one. Few even knew that she was engaged — she and James being both

silent people, who preferred not to perplex any one with their affairs.

Thus she drifted on, till she had ceased to feel herself a girl any more, and one day told Miss Waldershare, with a sort of pathetic amusement, of somebody who had called her a "born old maid." This was about the middle of the ten years. Very soon after, she arrived, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, at Miss Waldershare's door, dressed in deep mourning, looking pale and grave, but with a strange smile, not at all of hopeless misery, creeping about her mouth.

"I come to you in my trouble," she said; "I wanted to consult you — James would not understand — it is only a woman that would understand."

"What — what has happened?" looking in dread at her black dress. "Not — not Cyprian?"

"No; his wife — poor Issa. She has died, and left him with twins. Think! twins — brother and sister — just like Cyprian and me — only a month old!"

And then her self-restraint of many hours gave way, and Dorcas burst out weeping in her friend's opened arms.

It was a very sad story, to which, elderly and prudent woman as she was, Miss Waldershare

could not refuse her sympathy. Rash and foolish as the young couple had been, they had paid for their folly in keen suffering. At the last, the poor dying mother would have wanted the commonest comforts of life, but for the kindness which even strangers often show to one another in India.

"And what of the babies? Surely your father will relent now, and take the poor helpless babies!"

"N—no," said Dorcas, looking down. "In fact, Cyprian would not have let them go. He preferred sending them, in charge of his wife's ayah, to me."

"To you? Good heavens!"

"Oh—you could not say I am not to take them! My poor little babies—Cyprian's own children. Where should he have sent them except to me? I was his 'little mother,' you remember?"

"But the burden—the trouble—the expense even—in case he does not send money enough to maintain them."

"He will, or, if not, I can work," said Dorcas, calmly. "I do work as it is. It will be merely keeping the money here instead of sending it."

Here she stopped, blushing so violently that Miss Waldershare turned her head another

way. But she had only found out a fact long guessed, that every penny the sister earned and could spare went out to the poor young couple in India.

"God bless you, my dear! If you come for my advice, it is — just follow your own. But — Mr. Moffatt?"

"James is a man who always does his duty — he will never hinder me in doing mine," was the answer, given with much proud confidence.

"Well, and when do your twins arrive?"

"Cyprian put them on board a merchant-vessel, in charge of the captain and his wife. They may arrive any day. Only think — me with my two babies, my dear little twins!"

"You foolish girl! and how do you intend to manage them?"

"Doesn't somebody — yourself, I think — say that any woman with common sense and a motherly heart can soon learn how to manage a baby?"

So, caught in her own trap, Miss Waldershare ceased to look "severe," and entered heartily into the joy, almost extinguishing grief, that filled the heart of Cyprian's "little mother," in having these motherless babies to take care of. The burden of them — and Miss Waldershare foresaw how heavy it was likely to be,

for willing shoulders never lack a weight — was wholly forgotten in the inexpressible pride and delight.

So the two spinsters, young and old, made every preparation for the reception of the babies, feeling as happy as children with a new doll. It was foolish, perhaps, but natural, considering the sort of women they were; women whom it often pleases Heaven to make childless, if only for the sake of the many children in this world who are, outwardly, or in reality, motherless.

And when at last the twins arrived — two poor little skinny things, with great dark eyes and brown, wizened faces, not at all like wholesome English babies — their aunt's pride in them knew no bounds; for were they not her very own flesh and blood — Cyprian's children, bearing his name? And as they began to improve in looks, they were not unlike him — or she fancied so. Her happiness in them was something absolutely inexpressible.

And when, after a month or two, the ayah sailed for India — no slight relief — she took them entirely under her own charge, and, despite the forebodings of neighbors and friends, made a most capital nurse. Instead of dying, which everybody fully expected, the twins —

"Miss Hall's twins," as they were somewhat oddly called — were, though still brown and thin, as nice and even as pretty children as any on the Terrace — nay, in the whole town. Even old Miss Moffatt was proud of "our children;" and in her second childhood rather enjoyed having the silent house filled with young voices and the sound of pattering feet. Especially as, being thoroughly healthy, happy, and well cared for, the twins were almost always good. Their education, begun by their aunt at two months old, and never intrusted to any one but herself, was certainly no failure, as many a grave matron had prognosticated it would be, in smiling over the proverbial perfection of "old maids' children."

"Trouble?" wrote Dorcas in answer to some questions of Miss Waldershare's — "the poor little things are no trouble at all. I never amuse them — I teach them to amuse themselves. 'Two kittens and a ball of worsted' — the grand remedy for low spirits — why *my* 'kittens' are far the best, and they never hinder work" (the work which she now owned had become vitally necessary). "'Auntie busy — must not interrupt auntie,' they say, settle together in a corner of my painting-room — their 'den' we call it, and there they play together for hours.

I keep an eye — or half an eye — upon them, and that is all ; they never trouble me. They are such good little children."

It did occur to Miss Waldershare that a good nurse generally makes good children, and that those who complain of unruly ones might often, if they looked within, find better cause to complain of themselves. But she said nothing. There is a common but shrewd proverb, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating," and certainly no one could see the merry, wholesome, easily managed children and their contented aunt, and not feel that, however she did it, she contrived to make both them and herself thoroughly happy, without interfering with the happiness of anybody else. Even Mr. Moffatt, though at first a trifle jealous, soon became quite satisfied. For he saw her satisfied ; with her heart full of love, and her life full of duties, which, though not always easy, were always sweet.

And Cyprian ? —

Cyprian's letters — which Miss Waldershare sometimes got a sight of — were clever and charming as ever, and became gradually less and less sad. He was not of the temperament that grieves eternally, even for a lost wife. And presently he found plenty of work to do ; though it was hard work, and such small pay, Dorcas

said, that it was "fortunate" she herself was able to maintain the twins entirely. Dressed very plainly, and brought up simply, they were yet children whom any father might be proud of; and so would their father be, she hoped, when he came home.

"Papa's coming home" — the ideal "papa" whom the twins were constantly told of, and taught to believe in with a passionate admiration, as soon as their little minds could take in anything — was now the dream of Dorcas's life.

"If I could see him once again! — give his children into his arms, and watch him with them — he used to be so fond of children, and such a favorite with them, as he was with everybody. It is very hard for him to be parted from his pretty twins — many things have been very hard for him; but I think all is brightening. He is much better off now than he was. Poor Cyprian!"

In spite of the advancing prosperity, which showed itself, if not in regular payments, in very valuable Indian presents to herself and the children — she still called him "poor Cyprian!" But — it was a curious fact — she never by any chance called Mr. Moffatt "poor James!"

No, not though he worked hard and had few pleasures: his Fellowship barely gave him

enough to live on, and the College living still hung afar off "in the clouds." But he trusted Dorcas, and she trusted him ; they wrote constantly, and met occasionally, whenever they could. And what is it that makes happiness ? I think, not prosperity ; not even the attainment of all one wishes, but the power of enjoying what one has. A clean heart, a quiet conscience, a loving and faithful soul — these, in spite of outward circumstances, will create a happy, at least a not unhappy life. Therefore, I refuse to consider James Moffatt and Dorcas Hall altogether miserable.

Miss Waldershare, seeing this, ceased to be needlessly miserable concerning them. In truth, as the years slipped by, her restless anxiety over those she loved somewhat abated. She learned to trust Heaven a little more, and herself a little less ; to believe that the Father above would take care of her dear ones as well as she could — possibly a little better. Therefore, though she and Dorcas, tied by many duties, seldom met face to face, still she rested content about her friend, until one day, when, to her great surprise, she got a letter from Cyprian.

"I am not quite easy concerning my sister," he wrote ; "and would be grateful to you to tell me exactly how she is. She rarely speaks of

herself, but now she owns to being 'not strong;' and is very anxious that I should come home. Why? She is young still — we are not thirty yet" — that half-comical, yet infinitely pathetic "we" of twins. "But if her health is really



failing, what should I do? Who would take care of my children? I trust to you, her faithful friend, to tell me the exact truth concerning her."

Which, having exerted all her small strength

in a four days' visit to Dorcas, Miss Waldershare did.

"I do not consider your sister 'failing,'" was the letter that went out to Calcutta by the next mail, "but she is naturally delicate, and she has had a hard life. Two children to bring up — first to earn the money, and then to spend it" (Miss Waldershare could be severely candid when she thought right), "a feeble old lady to take charge of, and the anxiety of a doubtful future ; being torn in two, as it were — for when Mr. Moffatt does get the living which is promised him, and seems very near now, what is she to do? No man likes to enter on married life burdened with another man's children. Yes, my dear Cyprian, though not failing now, she may fail. I do think it would be right and best for you to come home."

Having written thus strongly, and without delay — for she felt these things ought to be said, and who was there to say them but herself? — Miss Waldershare was a long time before she heard any further ; for shortly afterwards she fell ill, and lingered weeks and months in that sort of semi-existence when everything but the things close at hand seems to grow dim, and she began to understand clearer how, by and by, the outside world and all its interests might

fade away from her altogether, almost without pain.

She had been a little surprised that Dorcas Hall never came to see her, never offered to come ; though writing regularly, and telling all the news about everybody, except herself. But these letters, so sweet and cheerful, as well as punctual, took away all suspicion that anything was wrong.

More especially as each letter brought brighter tidings. Mr. Moffatt had at last got the expected living in Derbyshire, such a pretty neighborhood, and a prettier parsonage — everything they could both desire. And Cyprian was coming home — they hoped in time for the marriage. Also, not alone. The twins would have to welcome not only their unknown father, but a step-mother — young, and, by her letters, very sweet and good.

This last piece of news Dorcas communicated by word of mouth, waiting beside Miss Waldershare at the station, whither, on her way to Buxton Baths, the invalid had begged to be met. By a battalion, as it turned out — Mr. Moffatt, Dorcas, and the little twins, now growing quite big children.

“I have told them they must learn to say ‘mamma,’ and that they are sure to love her. I

was not surprised — indeed I was quite glad,” she added. “Cyprian needed a wife so much ; and he has waited a long time.”

“Yes, six years *is* a long time, and men don’t like waiting,” said Miss Waldershare, rather satirically. “There is almost no such thing as a faithful man”

“Except James,” said Dorcas, gently, as she held out her hand to him with a smile. To the end of her days Miss Waldershare will never forget that look and that smile.

Somewhat to her friend’s surprise, Dorcas never referred to the question as to what was to be done with the twins when the father came home, or after he went back to India again. Nor did she speak much of her own future, scarcely of the future at all. She seemed quite absorbed in the happy present.

“Only to think, in one week Cyprian will be at home ! After ten years — ten long, anxious years. He will look quite middle-aged, I dare say. I shall hardly know him — or he me. Oh yes, we shall, — we shall ! And I shall show him his children, just like what he and I were in the days when I was his ‘little mother.’ Do you remember?”

Miss Waldershare did remember ; and thought, irradiated by this wonderful flood of joy, Dorcas,

pale and thin as she was, looked almost like the little Dorcas of the children's tea-party so many years ago. They spoke of it—and of heaps of other things—spending a most merry hour together: till at last the train started, and Miss Waldershare caught her last glimpse of the little group standing, as they would so soon stand on Southampton Quay—Dorcas with her two children, one in each hand—waiting for the ship with “papa” on board.

After that day, for more than ten days she heard nothing of the Halls. She thought, perhaps, they were too happy to remember her, and, being very suffering herself, was almost glad. When just making up her mind to write and say so, in the tenderest and least obtrusive way, she took up a two-days-old *Times*, and there read, in that fatal column which we often glance over so idly—as being no concern of ours—the “Deaths.”

“On the 24th, very suddenly, aged thirty years, Miss Dorcas Hall.”

That same day a letter from James Moffatt, brief and subdued, full of the quiet grief of one who knows he has half a lifetime still to work and to grieve in, explained everything.

People have died of joy, it is said: if any one ever did so die, it was surely Dorcas Hall.

As they found out afterward, she had been ailing for some time, but said nothing ; and had even supported, with a marvellous courage, five days of killing suspense, when the Indian mail became overdue ; and there were vague reports of some terrible disaster having happened in the Red Sea. But on the sixth day there came a telegram from Southampton, from Cyprian : *"Arrived safe and well ; shall be with you this evening."*

It was too much. Uttering a cry, almost a shriek of joy, she clasped her hands in thankfulness, then put them suddenly to her heart. In a moment, without a word or moan, with the smile still on her lips, and the telegram grasped in her fingers, Dorcas was "away." She had

"Taken up her crown and gone home,"

according to a sweet childish song — American and negro — which she was fond of singing to her little twins. All that day and night it rung in Miss Waldershare's half-stunned brain,

"She has taken up her crown and gone home,
And the angels are waiting at the door."

But, poor Cyprian. Feeble as she was, the very next day Miss Waldershare put herself in the train, and went to see Cyprian.

The terrace looked exactly as usual ; just as

it had done twenty years before, when she went to the children's tea-party. Old Miss Moffatt sat at the open window, basking in the summer sunshine, in her peaceful second childhood. There were no blinds down, of course ; all had happened a week ago ; they had resumed that old life — Dorcas was quite—quite “away.”

Miss Waldershare was shown into the drawing-room, where sat writing a tall, handsome bearded man — farther off a lady, very sweet looking, was trying to amuse two children — *her* children.

“We try to make them happy, and we shall succeed by and by,” said Cyprian, after the first bitter half-hour. “They are our own dear children.”

“And such good children,” added Cyprian's wife. “I never saw such good children.”

“It is all her doing,” the father exclaimed. “You knew what she was, and what she was to me, even when we were no older than these twins. They will never forget her — nor I. She has done everything for me all my life ; and now when I might have done something for her — ”

“God has done it differently,” said Miss Waldershare, laying her hand on the shoulder of the big, strong man, who had sunk down

sobbing like a baby. "Be content. He knows best."

"I believe that. But oh my 'little mother' — my 'little mother!'"



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